



# Dairy Business Innovation Initiatives

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**Fiscal Year 2021 Request for Applications – New Applicants**

**Funding Opportunity Number:** USDA-AMS-TM-DBII-G-21-0009

**Publication Date:** July 1, 2021

**Application Due Date:** 11:59 PM Eastern Time on August 30, 2021

## Program Solicitation Information

**Funding Opportunity Title:** Dairy Business Innovation Initiatives

**Funding Opportunity Number:** USDA-AMS-TM-DBII-G-21-0009

**Announcement Type:** Initial

**Assistance Listing Number:** 10.176

**Dates:** Applications must be received by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on August 30, 2021, through Grants.gov. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

**Executive Summary:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), requests applications for the fiscal year (FY) 2021 from organizations to host Dairy Business Innovation (DBI) Initiatives, which will add to the [existing three initiatives](#). These initiatives serve to:

- Diversify dairy product markets to reduce risk and develop higher value uses for dairy products,
- Promote business development that diversifies farmer income through processing and marketing innovation, and
- Encourage the use of regional milk production.

Approximately \$1.8 million is available to fund applications under this solicitation. AMS expects to establish at least one new regionally located dairy product and business innovation initiative in a geographic location that is not currently covered by the existing initiatives. Any selected entity is expected to serve as an initiative between fiscal years (FY) 2021 through 2024 and is expected to submit a non-competing application for each FY the DBI is appropriated funds during this tenure.

This announcement identifies the competitive eligibility criteria for DBI Initiatives, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply to be a DBI Initiative.

**Stakeholder Input:** AMS seeks comments about this Request for Applications (RFA). We will consider the comments in developing the next RFA for the program. Email written comments within one year of the publication date of this RFA to: [AMSGrants@usda.gov](mailto:AMSGrants@usda.gov). (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the **2021 Dairy Business Innovation Initiatives RFA – New Applicants**.

## 2021 Highlights and Changes

- [H.R. 133 – the Consolidated Appropriations Act](#) (Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Stimulus Funding) provided FY21 funding for both competitive (new initiatives) and non-competitive (current initiatives) DBI awards. This RFA is for considering competitive applications for new initiatives.
- The RFA and [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#) were updated to reflect changes in the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR part 200).
- Application budgets should include travel costs to attend an AMS grant coordinators conference. See [section 4.6.5](#) for more information.

## Application Checklist

AMS expects applicants to read the entire RFA prior to submitting their application to ensure that they understand the program’s requirements.

This application checklist provides the required and conditionally required documents for an application package.

DBI requires that **all application packages** include the following:

- ☐ SF-424 – Application for Federal Assistance (in Grants.gov)
- ☐ Project Narrative Form (including Fiscal Plan and Resources and Personnel Qualifications)
  - Ensure the required template is used
  - Ensure the executive summary is no more than 250 words
  - Ensure the Project Narrative does not exceed the page limit
  - Ensure project excludes unallowable costs and activities per [section 4.6](#)
- ☐ Signed Letter(s) of Commitment from each partner or collaborating organization at the time of application per [section 4.2.4](#)

If applicable, packages may also be required to include the following documents:

- ☐ Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) (PDF Attachment)

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## 1.0 FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

### 1.1 LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Dairy Business Innovation (DBI) Initiatives are authorized by section 204(b) of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 as supplemented by section 12513 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Public Law 115—334), ([7 U.S.C. § 1632d](#)).

### 1.2 PURPOSE

This program connects AMS with eligible entities to host DBI Initiatives to manage the program by supporting dairy businesses in the development, production, marketing, and distribution of dairy products. These initiatives specifically focus on:

- a. Diversifying dairy product markets to reduce risk and develop higher value uses for dairy products;
- b. Promoting business development that diversifies farmer income through processing and marketing innovation; and
- c. Encouraging the use of regional milk production.

This RFA is to select new entities that will serve as initiatives from FY 2021 through 2024. See [section 2.4](#) for more information.

#### 1.2.1 DEFINITIONS

**Dairy Businesses** are businesses that develop, produce, market, or distribute dairy products.

**Initiatives** are selected eligible entities that host this program with the purposes indicated under [section 1.2](#).

**Dairy Products** are products manufactured for use by humans which are derived from the processing of milk and include fluid milk products. Products may include but are not limited to butter, cheese (whether natural or processed), skim milk, cream, whey or buttermilk (whether dry, evaporated, stabilized or condensed), and frozen desserts.

### 1.3 PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Initiatives are expected to provide direct technical assistance and make sub-grants to dairy businesses. Initiatives must be positioned to draw on existing dairy industry resources, including dairy farm density and suitability, as well as activities conducted by dairy promotion and research programs (authorized by the Dairy Production Stabilization Act of 1983 and the Fluid Milk Promotion Act of 1990), research organizations, dairy businesses, or academic or industry stakeholders. Initiatives may serve a certain product niche, such as specialty cheese, or serve dairy businesses with dairy products derived from the milk of a specific type of dairy animal, including dairy products made from cow milk, sheep milk, and goat milk.

These initiatives will also consult with any authorized dairy promotion program and AMS in carrying out the program and report on outcomes of the program as well as any related activities and opportunities

to further increase dairy innovation. Selected host initiatives will adopt guidelines and procedures to prevent any conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest as required by [2 CFR § 400.2\(b\)](#) while providing the direct technical assistance and sub-grants to dairy businesses mentioned below.

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### 1.3.1 DIRECT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Initiatives will provide direct technical assistance to dairy businesses. Direct technical assistance includes nonmonetary assistance to dairy businesses through either private consultation or widely available distribution. Technical assistance may be provided directly through the host Initiative or through other partners or collaborators such as industry experts or research institutions, including cooperative extension services. Specific forms of assistance may include:

- Business consulting, including business plan development for processed dairy products, strategic planning assistance, and distribution and supply chain innovation;
- Marketing and branding assistance, including market messaging, packaging innovation, consumer assessments, innovation in emerging market opportunities, and evaluation of regional, national, and international markets;
- Assistance in product innovation, including the development of value-added products, innovation in by-product reprocessing and use maximization, and dairy product production training, including in new, rare, or innovative techniques; and
- Development or facilitation of informational websites, webinars, conferences, trainings, plant tours, and field days.

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### 1.3.2 SUBAWARDS TO DAIRY BUSINESSES

Initiatives will facilitate and have operational responsibility to carry out a subaward program with at least 50 percent of the awarded funds (e.g., an Initiative with a \$500,000 award will be expected to award at least \$250,000 in subawards). An initiative may provide a subaward to an entity that receives direct technical assistance as described in [section 1.3.1](#) to advance the business activities recommended through that assistance, while also conducting a competitive subaward program to dairy businesses that did not seek or receive direct technical assistance. The subaward program will focus on:

- a. Modernization, specialization, and grazing transition on dairy farms;
- b. Value chain and commodity innovation and facility and process updates for dairy processors; and
- c. Product development, packaging, and marketing of dairy products.

Individual subawards that Initiatives award will be to new or existing dairy businesses and will not be more than \$500,000. Initiatives will prioritize entities that receive direct technical assistance referenced in [section 1.3.1](#) and are:

- Dairy farms and dairy businesses with limited access to other forms of assistance;
- Employee-owned dairy businesses;
- Cooperatives; and
- Dairy businesses that seek to create dairy products that add substantial value in

processing or marketing, such as specialty cheeses.

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### 1.3.3 PRIORITY CONSIDERATION

AMS will prioritize applications that:

- Are in and serve a U.S. geographic area that is not currently served by the [existing Initiatives](#).
- Are inclusive of serving dairy businesses in multiple states.
- Have a diverse set of relevant project partners, including representation of historically underserved entities such as socially disadvantaged and/or beginning dairy farmers and ranchers, although such partners need not be based in the initiative's geographic region.

AMS will review and apply priority consideration, based on applicant narrative responses, during its administrative review process (see [section 5.2](#)).

## 2.0 AWARD INFORMATION

### 2.1 TYPE OF FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

AMS will use a Grant Agreement to provide a Federal award to successful applicants.

### 2.2 TYPE OF APPLICATIONS

**New application.** All new applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in [section 5.0](#).

### 2.3 AVAILABLE FUNDING

It is anticipated that approximately \$1.8 million will be available to fund new initiatives in FY 2021. Enactment of additional Federal continuing resolutions or appropriations may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

Selected entities will be expected to submit subsequent applications during their tenure as a host Initiative for each fiscal year that DBI is appropriated funds. The availability of these funds is subject to the enactment of continuing resolutions or appropriations. A separate award will be issued noncompetitively for each fiscal year and each award will be for a 3-year period.

### 2.4 FEDERAL AWARD PERIOD DURATION AND SIZE

Projects must be completed within 3 years. It is acceptable to complete a project before the scheduled period of performance end date. However, AMS encourages applicants to take the full duration to allow ample time to complete all subaward projects. The project period must begin no later than October 31, 2021 and end no later than October 30, 2024. The applicant must indicate the start and end dates on the SF-424, "Application for Federal Assistance" in block 17.

AMS will fund at least one new DBI Initiative. If it funds multiple initiatives, it will apportion the funds in equal amounts. For example, if AMS funds three Initiatives with approximately \$1.8 million, each Initiative will receive approximately \$600,000.

## 3.0 ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

### 3.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible entities include:

- State departments of agriculture or other state entities,
- Cooperative extension services,
- Institutions of higher education, and
- Nonprofit organizations.

Entities must have the capacity to provide consultation and the expertise necessary to advance the purpose and activities of DBI, including expertise in subaward competition, funds distribution and monitoring, to be considered eligible for this program.

Dairy promotion programs are not eligible to host an initiative.

All applicants must be domestic entities owned, operated, and located within the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or Tribal Governments.

### 3.2 PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

An applicant may subcontract or subaward with partners and collaborators. Only the applicant must meet the eligibility requirements listed in this RFA. Project partners and collaborators do not need to meet the eligibility requirements provided in [section 3.1](#).

- A *partnership* is a relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities in the management of the project.
- A *collaborator* is a person or an organization unaffiliated with the applicant that cooperates with the applicant in the conduct of the project and is not immediately connected to the management of the project.

Partners and collaborators may come from private or public, for-profit or nonprofit entities. Applicants must show evidence of existing community or industry support and engagement.

### 3.3 COST SHARING AND MATCHING

DBI does not have a Federal cost sharing or matching requirement.

## 4.0 APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

### 4.1 ELECTRONIC APPLICATION PACKAGE

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov in response to this RFA. AMS strongly encourages applicants to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process see Grants.gov's [Apply for Grants webpage](#). This RFA contains the information



needed to obtain and complete required application forms and AMS-specific attachments. More information about applying through Grants.gov can be found in [section 4.7](#).

Applicants can find the opportunity under either the Assistance Listing number “10.176,” or the DBI Funding Opportunity Number “USDA-AMS-TM-DBII-G-21-0009.

## 4.2 CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION

### 4.2.1 SF-424 APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

**Required:** Form SF-424 is available via the opportunity at Grants.gov. Most information blocks on the required form are either self-explanatory or adequately explained in the instructions. However, applicants must use the following supplemental instructions associated with specific blocks on the SF-424.

Block	Instructions
#1 Type of Submission	Application
#2 Type of Application	New
#4 through #7	Not required
#8c Organizational DUNS	Applicant DUNS# for the organization submitting the application. See <a href="#">D&amp;B Request a DUNS Number</a>
#8d Address	The applicant street address as it appears in SAM.gov. P.O. Boxes will not be accepted. Enter a 9-digit zip code.
#10 Name of Federal Agency	AMS, USDA
#11 Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (Assistance Listing Number)	10.176
#12 Funding Opportunity Number	USDA-AMS-TM-DBII-G-21-0009
#13 Competition Identification Number	Not applicable
#14 Areas Affected by Project	Enter cities, counties, States affected by project.
#15 Descriptive Title of Applicant’s Project	Provide a short description of the project.
#16a Congressional Districts for Applicant	Enter the Congressional district where your main office is located.
#16b Congressional Districts for Program/Project	Enter the Congressional district where your project will be implemented. Write “All” if the project will be implemented in more than one location.
#17 Proposed Project Start Date and End Date	Start Date: October 31, 2021. End date: No later than October 30, 2024.
#18a Estimated Funding – Federal	Total Federal amount requested.
#19 Is Applicant Subject to Review by State Under Executive Order 12372 Process?	See <a href="#">section 4.5</a> .

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#### 4.2.2 PROJECT NARRATIVE

**Required.** Applicants are required to prepare and submit a narrative using the [DBI Project Narrative](#) form. The form and instructions are available on the [program's webpage](#). The Project Narrative must clearly describe the project's objectives and goals, types and sequence of project activities, monitoring and evaluation strategies associated with the proposed activities, and how the applicant will manage the project (including the subaward process).

The narrative also includes a budget narrative and justification section. A general line-item for "grants" should be provided under Contracts in the application's budget. The individual subaward budgets are not expected at the submission of this application. However, selected initiatives will be expected to provide a comprehensive plan detailing each subaward project, associated outcomes, and applicable expenses in order to draw down on the funds associated with this line item.

The Project Narrative must be typed and single-spaced in an 11-point font and must not exceed twenty (20) 8.5 x 11 pages, excluding pre-existing form content. For example, if the form is 15 pages before you begin entering your project information, your form may be up to 35 pages in length when completed (15 original pages + 20 pages of applicant content). DO NOT modify the margins of the Project Narrative form. Handwritten applications or applications submitted in MS Word will not be accepted.

Prior to submitting the narrative to Grants.gov, please make sure no tracked changes or mark-up edits and comments are visible.

Applicants must submit the DBI Project Narrative form as a PDF and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the "Project Narrative Attachment Form" on the application package.

**The supporting documents listed below do not count toward the 20-page limit for the Project Narrative.**

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#### 4.2.3 PERSONNEL QUALIFICATIONS

**Required:** Provide a one- to two-page resume or summary of relevant experience and/or qualifications of the principal investigator(s) and for key staff from each of the other major project participants. Longer resumes will be disregarded.

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#### 4.2.4 LETTERS OF COMMITMENT FROM PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

**Required:** Applicants must provide letters of commitment from all project partners and collaborators. More information can be found on partners and collaborators in [section 3.2](#). The letter must state the partner or collaborator agrees to the work plan presented in the Project Narrative. The Letter of Commitment must include the following:

- Project Applicant
- Project Title
- A short introduction describing the partnering organization's mission and its interest in this program's development

- What the organization commits to participating in and supporting
- The time period of the partnership
- Roles of the participating individuals, as applicable, and any individual time commitment
- A statement that these individuals and the organization agree to abide by the work plan contained in the application

Letters of Commitment must be written on partner letterhead and addressed to the applicant (i.e., Project Director). Clearly indicate at the top of the documents that they are **LETTERS OF COMMITMENT**. Letters must accompany the proposal at the time of application. Unsigned letters will not be accepted. Emails will not be accepted.

Letter(s) must be attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Add Attachments” button under Form SF-424 item #15.

**PLEASE NOTE:** AMS does not require Congressional letters of support and such letters do not carry additional weight during the evaluation process.

#### 4.2.5 NEGOTIATED INDIRECT COST RATE AGREEMENT (NICRA)

**Required if the applicant has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA).** Refer to [section 4.6.1](#) for more information. The NICRA must be in PDF format and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Add Attachments” button under SF-424 item #15.

### 4.3 SUBMITTED APPLICATION QUALIFICATION

Your application may **not be reviewed or considered for funding** if it is:

- Received by Grants.gov after the submission deadline; or
- Submitted via any method other than through Grants.gov, or
- Submitted to the wrong grant program, or
- Not responsive to the requirements of this RFA (eligibility, incomplete application, not providing all required documents, etc.)

See [AMS’ Late and/or Non-Responsive Applications Policy](#) for more information.

### 4.4 SUBMISSION DATE AND TIME

Applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov. Ensure that all components of the application are complete before submission. Allow enough time for the application process, as it may take more than one attempt before your application is successfully submitted. AMS encourages you to submit your application at least two weeks prior to the application deadline to ensure all certifications and registrations are met.

Only applications submitted and validated by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on August 30, 2021, to Grants.gov will be accepted. See [AMS’ Late and/or Non-Responsive Applications Policy](#).

## 4.5 INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW

This program is not subject to [Executive Order 12372](#), which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials.

## 4.6 FUNDING RESTRICTIONS

### 4.6.1 INDIRECT COSTS

*Indirect costs* (also known as “facilities and administrative costs”—defined at [2 CFR § 200.1](#)) are those costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved.

As stated in the regulations ([2 CFR §§ 200.413](#) and [414](#)), any non-Federal entity that does not have a current negotiated (including provisional) indirect cost rate, except State and Local Government and Indian Tribe Indirect Cost Proposals, may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC) that may be used indefinitely. No documentation is required to justify the 10% de minimis indirect cost rate. As described in [2 CFR § 200.403](#), costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs, but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a recipient chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the recipient may apply to do at any time.

All applicants who elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent must use the MTDC as the base. MTDC are defined in [2 CFR § 200.1](#) as all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDCs exclude equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs, and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$25,000. Other items may be excluded only when necessary to avoid a serious inequity in the distribution of indirect costs, and with the approval of the cognizant agency for indirect costs.

If an applicant has a negotiated indirect cost rate approved by its cognizant agency, the applicant must submit a copy of its approved NICRA with its application. Entities that would like to negotiate an indirect cost rate must contact their cognizant agency. For assignments of cognizant agencies, see [2 CFR § 200.1](#).

### 4.6.2 ALLOWABLE AND UNALLOWABLE COSTS AND ACTIVITIES

All AMS awards are subject to the terms and conditions, cost principles, and other considerations described in the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#).

Applicants that have questions concerning the allowability of costs after reviewing this document should contact AMS staff using the contact information listed under [section 7.0](#).

### 4.6.3 SUBAWARD ALLOCATION

At least 50 percent of the funds of a grant to a host Initiative must be allocated to subawards.

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#### 4.6.4 COORDINATOR MEETING TRAVEL

Recipients are expected to attend an AMS sponsored grants management meeting during the project's period of performance. The proposed budget should include travel funds for the Project Coordinator and any additional key personnel as reasonably determined by the recipient and AMS.

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#### 4.6.5 SUPPORT FOR DOMESTIC DAIRY BUSINESSES

Technical assistance and subawards will not be made available to a foreign person making direct investment in the United States, as defined in [15 CFR § 801.2](#), where the assistance is provided to a specific dairy business and is not publicly available.

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### 4.7 GRANTS.GOV APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS

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#### 4.7.1 HOW TO REGISTER TO APPLY THROUGH GRANTS.GOV

The applicant **organization registration** process can take **up to four weeks** to complete. Therefore, complete your registration allowing enough time to ensure it does not impact your ability to meet required application submission deadlines.

If individual applicants are eligible to apply for this grant funding opportunity, refer to:

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration.html>

Organization applicants can find complete instructions here:

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html>

- 1) *Obtain a DUNS Number:* All entities applying for funding, including renewal funding, must have a [Data Universal Numbering System \(DUNS\) number](#) from Dun & Bradstreet (D&B). Applicants must enter the DUNS number in the data entry field labeled "Organizational DUNS" on the SF-424 form.
- 2) *Register with SAM:* In addition to having a DUNS number, organizations applying online through Grants.gov must register with the [System for Award Management \(SAM\)](#). All organizations must register with SAM to apply online. Failure to register with SAM will prevent your organization from applying through Grants.gov. **SAM.gov accounts must be updated annually, and your organization must have an active SAM.gov account to submit your application to Grants.gov.**
- 3) *Create a Grants.gov Account:* The next step in the registration process is to [create an account with Grants.gov](#). Applicants must know their organization's DUNS number to complete this process. Completing this process automatically triggers an email request for applicant roles to the organization's E-Business Point of Contact (EBiz POC) for review. The EBiz POC is a representative from your organization who is the contact listed for SAM. To apply for grants on behalf of your organization, you will need the Authorized Organization Role (AOR).
- 4) *Authorize Grants.gov Roles:* After creating an account on Grants.gov, the EBiz POC receives an email notifying him or her of your registration and request for roles. The EBiz POC will then log in to Grants.gov and [authorize the appropriate roles](#), including the AOR role, thereby giving you

permission to complete and submit applications on behalf of the organization. You will be able to submit your application online any time after you have been approved as an AOR.

- 5) *Track Role Status*: After registering with Grants.gov and authorizing the applicant AOR, Grants.gov allows you [to track your status](#).
- 6) *Electronic Signature*: When applications are submitted through Grants.gov, the name of the organization's AOR who submitted the application is inserted into the signature line of the application, serving as the electronic signature. The EBiz POC **must** authorize individuals who are able to make legally binding commitments on behalf of the organization to act as an AOR; **this step is often missed, and it is crucial for valid and timely submissions.**

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#### 4.7.2 HOW TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION TO AMS VIA GRANTS.GOV

Applicants may use the Grants.gov Workspace, a shared, online environment where members of a grant team may simultaneously access and edit different webforms within an application. For each funding opportunity announcement, an applicant creates individual instances of a workspace.

- 1) *Create a Workspace*: This allows you to complete your Workspace online and route it through your organization for review before submitting.
- 2) *Complete a Workspace*: Add participants to the workspace, complete all the required forms, and check for errors before submission.
  - a. *Adobe Reader*: If you decide not to apply by filling out the webforms, you can download individual PDF forms in Workspace so that they will appear similar to other Standard or AMS forms. The individual PDF forms can be downloaded and saved to your local storage device, network drive(s), or external drives, and then accessed through Adobe Reader.

NOTE: You may need to visit the [Adobe Software Compatibility page on Grants.gov](#) to download the appropriate version of the software. There is no cost for Adobe Reader Software.
  - b. *Mandatory Fields in Forms*: Fields marked with an asterisk and a different background color are mandatory fields you must complete to successfully submit your application.
  - c. *Complete SF-424 Fields First*: The forms are designed to fill in common required fields across other forms, such as the applicant name, address, and DUNS number. To trigger this feature, an applicant must complete the SF-424 information first. Once it is completed, the information will transfer to the other forms.

- 3) *Submit via a Workspace*: Submit your application through Workspace by clicking the Sign and Submit button on the Manage Workspace page, under the Forms tab. Grants.gov recommends submitting your application package **at least 24-48 hours prior to the close date** to provide you with time to correct any potential technical issues that may disrupt the application submission.

SPECIAL NOTE: Grants.gov **does not** check for AMS required attachments. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all required attachments listed in [section 4.2](#) are included.

- 4) *Track via a Workspace:* After successfully submitting a workspace package, Grants.gov automatically assigns a Tracking Number (GRANTXXXXXXX) to the package, which will be listed on the Confirmation page generated after submission.

*Applicant Support:* Grants.gov provides additional [training resources, including video tutorials](#). Applicants may also call the 24/7 toll-free support number 1-800-518-4726, or email [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov). Grants.gov will issue a ticket number to which you and Grants.gov can refer if the issue is not resolved. For non-Grants.gov questions related to the specific grant opportunity, use the contact information described in [section 7.0](#).

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#### 4.7.3 TIMELY RECEIPT REQUIREMENTS AND PROOF OF TIMELY SUBMISSION

All applications must be received by the due date established in [section 4.4](#). Proof of timely submission is automatically recorded by Grants.gov using an electronic date/time stamp generated when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov. The applicant AOR will then receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov. Applicant AORs will also receive the official date/time stamp and Grants.gov tracking number in an email serving as proof of their timely submission.

When AMS successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov and acknowledges the download of submissions, Grants.gov will electronically acknowledge receipt of the application to the applicant AOR's email address. Again, proof of timely submission shall be the acknowledgement email stating the official date and time that Grants.gov receives your application.

AMS will not accept application packages by fax, email or postal mail. Applications received by Grants.gov after the established due date for the program will be considered late and will not be considered for funding by AMS. See [AMS' Late and/or Non-Responsive Applications Policy](#).

*Special Note for Applicants with Slow Internet Connections.* Applicants using slow internet, such as dial-up connections, may experience significantly longer transmission times when submitting their application to Grants.gov, especially if there are large attachments contained in the upload. Again, Grants.gov will provide either an error message or a successfully received transmission notification via email to the applicant AOR.

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#### 4.7.4 TIPS FOR APPLICANTS

- Register and submit applications early. DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE DAY OF THE APPLICATION DEADLINE.
- Thoroughly read this RFA and follow all instructions provided by AMS.
- Thoroughly review the AMS General [Terms and Conditions](#) to understand allowable and unallowable costs.
- Apply to the correct grant program:
  - Assistance Listing (formerly CFDA) number "10.176" and Funding Opportunity Number "USDA-AMS-TM-DBII-G-21-0008."

- Make sure you have the most recent copy of Adobe Reader installed on your computer and that it is compatible with [Grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) software. Grants.gov supports Adobe Reader version 9.0.0 and higher.
- Limit Application File Name Characters (50 or less).
- When uploading attachments, click the “Add Attachments” button (do NOT use the “paperclip” icon in Adobe Reader).
- Do not password-protect your documents and make sure all tracked-changes are “accepted”.
- Avoid Special Characters in File Names (\$, %, &, \*, Spanish "ñ", etc.).
- Input the correct DUNS number on the SF-424 cover page.
- Review the Grants.gov Applicant User and Registration Guides:  
<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-faqs.html>  
<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/workspace-overview.html>.

## 5.0 APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

### 5.1 PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each application that meets the initial qualification screening requirements (see [section 5.2](#)) will be reviewed and scored competitively based on the extent to which it addresses the following criteria:

#### **Alignment and Intent**..... **25 Points**

- 1) The application describes the project’s objectives and their relevance to the identified issues or needs.
- 2) The application describes a proposed geographic focus area of the project and why it is the most appropriate place to conduct project activities supporting dairy businesses in the development, production, marketing, and distribution of dairy products.
- 3) The application identifies the intended beneficiaries, including the number of beneficiaries and how they will benefit.
- 4) The application complies with all written instructions and requirements described within the RFA and Project Narrative Template.

#### **Technical Merit**..... **25 Points**

- 1) The application presents a clear, well-conceived, and overall suitable methodology for fulfilling the goals and objectives, including both offering technical assistance and providing subawards that focus on:
  - a. Modernization, specialization, and grazing transition on dairy farms;
  - b. Value chain and commodity innovation and facility and process updates for dairy processors; and
  - c. Product development, packaging, and marketing of dairy products.



- 2) The application presents a realistic timeline for implementing the proposed Initiative (including subaward administration) during the award performance period.
- 3) The application demonstrates a high-quality record of administering Federally funded programs and that the Initiative has the capacity and control systems necessary to administer the technical assistance and subawards.

**Achievability** ..... **15 Points**

- 1) The selected outcomes and indicators are feasible for the scale and scope of the project including:
  - a. How indicator numbers were derived with a clear means to collect feedback to evaluate and achieve each relevant outcome indicator; and
  - b. The anticipated key factors that are predicted to contribute to and restrict progress toward the applicable indicators, and action steps for addressing identified restricting factors.
- 2) The application describes an outcome measurement plan that identifies potential feedback mechanisms and metrics that detect changes that occur as a result of project activities.
- 3) The applicant provides a comprehensive plan to disseminate the Initiative's results (both positive and negative) to target audiences, stakeholders, and interested parties.

**Expertise and Partners** ..... **25 Points**

- 1) The application represents a substantial, effective, and diverse array of relevant partners to accomplish the project's goals and objectives and meet the needs of the intended beneficiaries, including:
  - a. Commitment from the key staff demonstrated through Letters of Commitment from Partner and Collaborator Organizations;
  - b. Key staff who will be responsible for managing the projects and the individuals (name and title) who comprise the Project Team;
  - c. Project Team expertise necessary to successfully manage and implement the proposed project; and
  - d. Ability to draw on existing dairy industry resources, including activities conducted by an authorized dairy promotion program, research capacity, academic and industry expertise, a density of dairy farms or farmland suitable for dairying, and dairy businesses.
- 2) The application describes specific roles and/or resources that partners or collaborators will be contributing to the project's development, implementation, and/or management.
- 3) The application describes a diverse set of collaborators and partners, including historically underserved entities such as socially disadvantaged and/or beginning dairy farmers and ranchers.

- 4) The application describes plans for coordination, communication, and data sharing and reporting among members of the Initiative and stakeholder groups, including both internal personnel **and** external partners and collaborators.

**Fiscal Plan and Resources** ..... **10 Points**

- 1) The Budget and Justification provides a clear description for each budget line item and is consistent with the size and scope of the project.
- 2) The Budget and Justification relates logically to the project narrative.
- 3) The Budget provides evidence that critical resources and infrastructure that are necessary for the initiation and completion of the proposed project are currently in place.
- 4) The Budget demonstrates that sufficient staff, administrative support, and other resources will be assigned to fulfill the Initiative's objectives.

## 5.2 REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

### *Step 1: Initial Qualification Screening*

Each application is initially reviewed for overall completeness, as well as compliance with eligibility and program requirements as set forth in this RFA. If an application does not meet these requirements, it is removed from consideration. Please see [section 4.3](#) and [AMS' Late and/or Non-Responsive Applications Policy](#) for more information.

### *Step 2: Technical Review*

Each application that passes initial screening (Step 1) is evaluated by a panel of independent peer reviewers. AMS makes every attempt to match reviewers with applications in their areas of expertise. Each reviewer signs a conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement regarding any assigned proposals. The peer review panels evaluate their assigned proposals using instructions prepared by AMS officials. Individual reviewers confer with other team members to derive a consensus score. The consensus review serves as the basis for awarding and allocating grant funds and focuses on strengths and weaknesses of each proposal.

### *Step 3: Administrative Review*

AMS will conduct a final administrative evaluation of each review panel's top rankings and recommendations. In addition to the rank and scores, AMS reviews each application to ensure that potential recommended projects align with the scope of the RFA, allowability of budget items, available funding, geographic diversity, and USDA priorities (see [section 1.3.3](#)). AMS staff will work with top-ranked applicants to negotiate any revisions if necessary and possible. AMS will also assess an organization's ability to account for the use of Federal funds and monitor the performance associated with these monies using the guidance provided by [2 CFR § 200.206](#).

## 6.0 AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

### 6.1 AWARD NOTICES

Upon announcement of the Federal awards, AMS will prepare and send a Notice of Award and Grant Agreement to each recipient for signature by the appropriate official. Grant Agreements consist of a 1-page Agreement Face Sheet (AMS-33) that will be signed by AMS and the AOR.

The Notice of Award and Grant Agreement will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the information described in [2 CFR § 200.211](#) and a reference to the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#).

### 6.2 UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

Unsuccessful applicants will be contacted by AMS via email as soon as possible after the DBI awards are announced. The unsuccessful applicants will be provided anonymous review panel consensus comments regarding their proposals as feedback.

### 6.3 ADMINISTRATIVE AND NATIONAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS

As part of the Notice of Award and Grant Agreement, all AMS recipients must abide by the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#), which reference applicable *Administrative and National Policy Requirements*.

### 6.4 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Reporting and award closeout requirements are included in the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, those will be identified in the award.

## 7.0 AGENCY CONTACTS

### 7.1 PROGRAMMATIC QUESTIONS

After closely reviewing this RFA in its entirety, applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact the DBI staff by e-mail with questions about the grant program at [IPPGGrants@usda.gov](mailto:IPPGGrants@usda.gov).

**For additional information, please visit the DBI Website:** <https://www.ams.usda.gov/dbi>.

### 7.2 ADDRESS

#### **Dairy Business Innovation Initiatives**

USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service

1400 Independence Avenue, SW

Room 2055 South Building

Stop 0201

Washington, DC 20250-0264

[www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/dbi](https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/dbi)

### 7.3 AVAILABLE RESOURCES

AMS provides resources and information on the DBI website (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/dbi>) that may be helpful to applicants, including descriptions of funded projects and required application forms.

### 7.4 GRANTS.GOV QUESTIONS

All questions regarding Grants.gov technical assistance must be directed to Grants.gov's [Applicant Support](#).

## 8.0 OTHER INFORMATION

### 8.1 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

### 8.2 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS

The Freedom of Information Act of 1966 ([5 U.S.C. § 552](#)) (FOIA) and the Privacy Act of 1974 ([5 U.S.C. § 552a](#)), as implemented by USDA's regulations ([7 CFR § 1, Subpart A](#)) govern the release or withholding of information to the public in connection with this Federal award. The release of information under these laws and regulations applies only to records held by AMS and imposes no requirement on the recipient or any subrecipient to permit or deny public access to their records.

FOIA requests for records relating to this Federal award may be directed to USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, FOIA/PA Officer, Room 1671-S, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-0273, Telephone: (202) 302-0650; or email: [AMS.FOIA@usda.gov](mailto:AMS.FOIA@usda.gov).

### 8.3 PAPERWORK REDUCTION

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 ([44 U.S.C. 3501](#)), an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0581-0240. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 4 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.